

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Brown, CC. **Harnessing the power of Google: what every researcher should know.** Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO; 2017. Softcover: 134 p. ISBN: 978-1-4408-5712-6. Price: USD \$55.00. Available from: <http://www.abc-clio.com>

My excitement when I received this book to review was palpable. As a hospital librarian, I use Google to supplement my database searches and am often asked for advice on searching Google. I thought I had a good handle on searching Google and on instructing library users on its use, so was thrilled at the opportunity to improve upon my skills. I first thought it would be a “how to” book on using Google, but the subtitle, “What Every Researcher Should Know,” clearly defines the book’s purpose. This book is a deeper dive into Google and its services.

Harnessing the Power of Google is written by Christopher C. Brown, the Reference Technology Librarian at the University of Denver. He is also an affiliate faculty member in its MLIS program and has a wealth of experience in using and teaching about Google. This book was written for researchers and academic librarians, but health science librarians will definitely benefit from its wisdom.

The book is comprised of 10 chapters, including “How Google Works”, “Power Searching for Primary Sources”, “Google Scholar”, “Google as a Complement to Library Tools”, and “Searching for Statistics”. The chapters flow from the basic searching techniques of Google to the more specialized, scholarly aspects of Google.

I found the first half of the book interesting and helpful. I particularly liked the author’s comments in the first chapter, “Searching Generally”, about controlled vocabularies: “There are two disciplines where exactness in searching is absolutely essential: medicine and law”.

Brown covers basic research concepts, including subject headings versus subject descriptors, controlled vocabulary versus full text searching and natural language searching, and use of proximity operators. He also lays out what is needed for good searching; including understanding the strengths and weaknesses

of the resource you are searching. He outlines the strengths of library online catalogue style searching, full text searching of web pages, phrase searching, and site specific searching. He also includes a section on evaluating web content.

The chapter called “Searching Google Web” provides an excellent overview of basic and power searching techniques. I felt the chapter on searching U.S. government, international, and foreign government websites would be of interest to certain researchers as it went into a lot of detail about how to find information on websites from different levels of government (e.g. state, federal, etc.).

The chapter entitled “Google Scholar and Scholarly Content” provides an excellent overview for using Google Scholar. It also highlights the importance of linking library content to Google Scholar. Brown states, “Scholar is not a tool that works in opposition to libraries, rather it is one of the greatest proponents of the richness of an academic library’s expensive investment”.

Brown describes Google Books as the greatest books discovery tool to date, given that it contains data gathered through both the Library Project and the Google Books Partner Program, where Google has partnered with publishers, authors and libraries to provide bibliographic data or an excerpt of a book as he mentions, it’s a great discovery tool, but is not good at fulfillment. Head to your academic library for that.

My favourite chapter was “Google as a Complement to Library Tools”. He gives examples of why students so quickly give up on library catalogues for discovery and go to Google. He often advises students to start with Google Scholar first, because it is fast, efficient and produces more results quickly, but then to play “clean up” in specific library databases. He has a thought provoking section titled “What’s Wrong with Academic Libraries”. The chapter highlights the synergy between Google or web based searching and academic libraries, and how each has different strengths.

Harnessing the Power of Google is a book that offers so much on many different levels. Although not a “how to” book on searching Google, it provides a

complete overview of all the different services that Google provides and how to search them effectively. Brown goes into the background of the Google services which ultimately enhances one's understanding and improves one's searching of them. He supports Google as a discovery tool that complements the resources and services that a library provides. I think this book will be particularly useful to academic librarians. However, I think that health science librarians will appreciate the deeper dive that Brown takes into Google, which will enable them to improve their searching skills and also pass along pearls of wisdom to staff and students.

Statement of Competing Interests

No competing interests declared.

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